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RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES

BY A LAYMAN

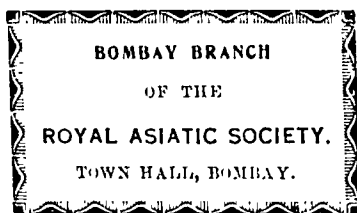


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## RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES.



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BY A LAYMAN.

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NEW EDITION.



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## PREFACE.

THE history of the following remarkable productions of their illustrious author's mind, may be very briefly told. They were written some time ago, with the kind intention of serving a youthful friend, then pursuing his theological studies; but without the slightest idea that they would ever meet the public eye. Circumstances, however, which have occurred since that period, induced the gentleman for whom they were composed, to request the

author's permission to publish them for his own benefit, which was cordially granted.

In these Discourses, the reader will find some of the most momentous questions which can exercise the human mind, discussed with great eloquence, ingenuity, and force of argument. Yet it was not without a strong feeling of diffidence, that the writer consented to lay before the public this new and striking proof of the strength and versatility of his genius, as will appear from the following Extract of a Letter.

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“ THE Religious Discourses which you call to my mind, were written entirely for your use, and are therefore your property.

They were never intended for publication, as nobody knows better than yourself; nor do I willingly consent that they should be now given to the press, as it may be thought that I have intermeddled with matters for which I have no commission. I have also to add, that they contain no novelty of opinion, and no attempt at brilliancy of composition. They were meant, I may remind you, to show that a rational and practical discourse upon a particular text was a task more easily performed than you, in your natural anxiety, seemed at the time disposed to believe. I am afraid that those who open this pamphlet with expectations of a higher kind will be much disappointed. As, however, you seem to be of opinion, that the publication might be attended with much benefit to you, I make no objection to it, and will be glad to hear that

it suits your purpose. This Letter will sufficiently indicate my consent to any gentleman of the trade with whom you may treat.

“ I am yours, very sincerely,

“ W. S.”

*Abbotsford, January 2, 1828.*

# DISCOURSE 1.



THE CHRISTIAN AND THE JEWISH  
DISPENSATIONS COMPARED.



## DISCOURSE I.

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### THE CHRISTIAN AND THE JEWISH DISPENSATIONS COMPARED.

MATTHEW v. 17.

“ Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets ; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

THE Sermon on the Mount formed one of those occasions upon which our blessed Saviour condescended to intimate to his followers, at considerable length, the purpose of his heavenly mission, and the relation which it bore to the ancient dis-

pensation of Moses, under which the Jews had been trained for so many centuries. The text before us, as well as the words which follow in the same chapter, contain an express and general declaration on this subject, startling perhaps to those who listened to the Divine Speaker at the time, and on which infidels in subsequent times have endeavoured to ground a charge of inconsistency. We will presume, with such conciseness as the occasion requires, and with the humility becoming those who venture to approach the Ark of the Covenant, to consider this most important declaration as it concerns—First: Those to whom it was instantly and directly addressed ; and, Secondly, the present generation, who look back on what was then spoken with the ad-

vantage of comparing the divine prophecy with the events which have since ensued.

Upon the first point, we are to remember that Jesus came to his own, and that his own received him not. He proffered the inestimable treasures of the Gospel to that chosen people to whom God himself had condescended to be legislator; and, vain of their own imaginary wealth, they refused to accept this new and far richer gift at his hands. Nay, it even seemed that the nearer they approached in external observances, at least, to claim in a peculiar manner the title of children obedient to the law of their heavenly Father, the less were the Jews disposed to recognize Him that was greater than Moses. His mission was rejected by the Sadducees, the free-thinkers of the Judaical institution, who

disbelieved the existence of angel and spirit, and whose sceptical and selfish opinions made them deaf to the proclamation of salvation. They, who believed in no state of future retribution, and conceived that the souls and bodies of men went down to the grave together, luxurious as men who would enjoy the passing hour, and indifferent as men who held speculative doctrines as of trifling importance, were naturally averse to the reception of a system which implied a general renunciation of all temporal benefits, and subjected the disciples of Christ, as well as their Divine Teacher, to peril, privation, captivity and death.

But besides these Epicureans of Israel, the Pharisees, also, a sect who placed their pride in the most precise observances of

the law of Moses; who admitted the existence of a state of future rewards and punishments; who believed in the immortality of the soul, and were systematically regular in divine worship and religious ordinances, were even more inimical to the Gospel than the Sadducees themselves. What startled the *Atheist* amid his carnal enjoyments, no less disturbed the *hypocrite*; who, in the plenitude of spiritual pride, thanked God that he had not made him as other men, or even as the humble publican, who, with a contrite and broken heart, was laying a confession of his sins before an offended Deity.

The cause of the Pharisees' unbelief, and their strenuous opposition to the Gospel tenets, had root undoubtedly in our blessed

Saviour's detection of their hypocrisy, and his publicly exposing the foul principles and practices which they covered with the most formal affectation of strict holiness. They could not bear the light, which, not content with playing on the outside of their whited sepulchres, penetrated into their foul charnels, and showed to the public gaze the dust and rottenness which their shewy exterior concealed. They could not endure the friendly zeal of the Divine Physician, when he rent from their wounds the balsams with which they soothed, and the rich tissues under which they concealed them, and exhibited festering and filthy cancers which could be cured only by the probe, the knife, and the cautery. Hence they were, from the beginning of our Saviour's ministry until

its dreadful consummation, (in which they had a particular share,) the constant enemies of the doctrine and of the person of the blessed Jesus. Under his keen and searching eye, the pretensions which they had so long made in order to be esteemed of men, were exposed without disguise; their enlarged garments and extended phylacteries, their lengthened prayers, their formal ceremonial, and tithes of mint and anise, were denounced as of no avail without the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. Feeling thus their own sanctimonious professions held up to contempt, and their pretensions to public veneration at once exposed and destroyed, the Pharisees became the active and violent opposers of those doctrines to which the Sadducees, with sullen apathy,

seem to have refused a hearing. It was the Pharisees who maligned the life of our blessed Lord ; who essayed to perplex the wisdom of Omnipotence by vain and captious interrogatories ; and who, unable to *deny* those miracles by which the mission of Christ was authenticated and proved, blasphemously imputed them to the agency of dæmons.

But, in particular, their objections were founded upon arguments the most powerful of any with the pride and national prejudices of the Jews, when they objected that Jesus of Nazareth had it in contemplation to innovate upon and destroy the Levitical Law, that ancient and solemn system of institutions committed to the children of Israel by Omnipotent wisdom ; the demolition of which must have

had the natural consequence of blending together Jews and Gentiles, and stripping the former of all those distinguished privileges which were assigned to them as the children of the promise. Such arguments, we may easily conceive, were more likely than any other to obstruct the progress of the Christian religion. “Who is this,” the scoffers might have said, “who is wiser than Moses, and more holy than Aaron? Who is this, who presumes to lower and deface the glory of the sanctuary, and to annul those institutions, to the observance of which such splendid promises, to the neglect of which such direful punishments are annexed in the Mosaic statutes?” *Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them* : such are the recorded words of the

Almighty—" And who is he," may these blinded Israelites have demanded, " who pretends to relax or innovate upon a system so fearfully sanctioned?" The text which we have before us must be considered as the answer of Jesus to these misrepresentations—*Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets ; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.* And this declaration will be found equally true, whether we examine it with reference to the doctrines preached and enforced by our Saviour, or to that fulfilment of the law and the prophets which arose from his life, his sufferings, and his death for our redemption.

Considering the text in the *first* point of view, the principal topics insisted upon in the Sermon on the Mount, shew that

Jesus, the divine commentator upon a divine work, preached to his disciples, and to the Jews in general, the fulfilment of the Law, by shewing them in what the spirit and efficacy of the Mosaic institutions actually consisted.

Although there be no question that the Almighty, through all ages, had been pleased to enlighten the eyes of many individuals among his chosen people, to see and know the secret purposes of his dispensation, yet it is certain that the great majority of the Jewish nation had, for some time prior to the advent of our Saviour, fallen into many gross and carnal errors both respecting the Law and the Prophets. In regard to the former, they, and particularly the sect of the Pharisees, seem to have lost all sense of the end

and purpose of the types and ceremonies enjoined by Moses, and to have substituted the minute discharge of his ritual as something excellent and meritorious in itself, capable of being received as an atonement for the neglecting those general points of virtue and morality upon which that dispensation, as well as all that emanates from the Divine Author, was originally founded, and with which it ought for ever to have been animated. But when the observance of the minute ceremonial was substituted instead of love to God and duty to our neighbours, the system resembled some ancient tree, which continues to shew green boughs and a stately form to those who regard it only on the outside, but when carefully examined proves rotten and false at heart,

and valueless excepting as a matter of outward show ;

“ All green and wildly fresh without, but worn and grey within.”

In pointing out to his hearers, therefore, the true fulfilment of the Law, our blessed Redeemer shewed that it consisted not in a strict and literal interpretation of the express precepts of the Law, but in the adoption of an ample and liberal interpretation, carrying the spirit of each precept into all the corresponding relations of life. Thus, he taught that not alone by actual slaughter was the perpetrator in danger of the judgment, but that all causeless enmity, all injurious language, the source and provocation of deeds of violence, was forbidden. Not only, added the same pure

and heavenly Teacher, is the foul act of adultery prohibited in the Law, but all unclean thoughts which lead to such a crime are forbidden by the same precept. The same Law, pursues the Divine Interpreter, which prohibits a breach of oath, forbids, by its essence, all idle and unnecessary appeals to that solemnity; and the same precept which *verbally* goes no farther than to enjoin an equitable retribution of injuries according to the *lex talionis*, includes in it a recommendation to humility, to patience under and forgiveness of injuries, to universal benevolence, to the return of good for evil, and to the practice of every virtue, not in the restricted and limited sense of compliance with the letter of the Law, but with an extended and compre-

hensive latitude, becoming the children of our heavenly Father, whose universal benevolence causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his rain to descend on the just and the unjust.

In this sense, therefore, as a commentator on the Law, and addressing himself to those who were born under its dispensations, did Jesus come *not* to destroy, but to fulfil it; not to take away the positive prohibition of gross evil, but to extend that prohibition against the entertainment of angry and evil thoughts, which are the parents of such actions;—not to diminish the interdiction against violence and malevolence, but to enlarge it into a positive precept enjoining to benevolence in action, and resignation in suffering. At the same time, our Saviour

taught the inferior value of that compliance with the forms of the ritual so much insisted upon by the Pharisees, when placed in competition with the practice of the virtues enjoined by the Law ;—and that reconciliation with an offended brother, was a duty preferable even to the offering up a gift, although the devout ceremonial was already commenced by its being laid upon the altar. In a word, our Saviour taught his disciples such a fulfilment of the Law as might in spirit and effect far exceed the dry, formal, literal compliances of which hypocrites shewed themselves capable, for the carnal purpose of raising themselves in the opinion of others ; and he sealed his interpretation with the awful denunciation, *Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes*

*and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Thus far, therefore, have we proceeded upon the first head of our discourse, being an attempt to shew how far the doctrines of Christ, as preached before his disciples, were consonant to and a fulfilment of the law of Moses ; and it would be no difficult task to prove, from a comparison of texts, that the germs of the Christian doctrine, so beautifully and broadly developed and displayed in the Gospel, are to be found in the ancient dispensation, although they had been unhappily lost sight of, by such pretenders to sanctity, among the Jews, as found the observance of the Mosaic ceremonial, more easy than compliance with the benevolent precept enforced as well in the Law as in the Gospel—*Thou*

*shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Lev. xix.

18. But such an investigation would lead us too far from our present purpose.

*Secondly.* The Law was not only expounded by Jesus in reference to its being fulfilled in spirit and in truth by his disciples. This exposition indeed was all that could be distinctly understood by the ears which his immediate discourse made blessed ; but there was a further and more mysterious meaning, not to be understood at the moment by those to whom the text was addressed, but upon which future events, the death and resurrection of our blessed Saviour, and the general increase of Christianity, have cast an awful and important light. The Law and the Prophets were not to be destroyed, but to be fulfilled, not only by the doctrines which

Christ preached explanatory of their true import, but by the events of his life, and by the scheme of redemption which he promulgated. And it is here that infidels, availing themselves as usual of an insulated text, and subjecting it to their own exclusive interpretation, have asked the Christians triumphantly, in what manner the words of the Founder of our religion have been verified. “Came not *he*,” say such cavillers, “to destroy the Law and the Prophets, briefly after whose advent Jerusalem and her temple were destroyed, her sanctuary defiled and violated, and the observances of the Mosaic Law rendered in many instances impossible, even to the scattered remnant who yet profess obedience to them? Are not these,” such persons urge, “the direct consequences of

the Christian religion?—is not the destruction of the Law of Moses included in the detail which we have given?—and can it then be said that the Founder of the rival dispensation came upon earth not to destroy the old Law, but to *fulfil* it?”

Such are the objections to which it is our duty to be prepared with an answer, “shewing a reason for the faith that is in us.” We shall for this purpose view the text both in the negative and positive branch, and endeavour to prove, 1st. That Christ came not to destroy the Law. 2dly. That by his coming the Law was fulfilled; and to such an extent, that as never a richer propitiation was made to offended justice, never were unhappy criminals, if enabled by faith to discover the true way to safety, more fully entitled to sue out their pardon

under a law, which, however rigid, had been, by the sufferings and death of our blessed Redeemer, completely satisfied and fulfilled.

*First.* Our blessed Saviour came not to destroy the Law of Moses; and that the typical ceremonial, the national and peculiar enactments of the Jewish legislator should be abrogated, was no condition of the Gospel offered to them, but a consequence of their own rejection of the terms of proffered salvation. God was not forgetful of the promise he had made to his servant Abraham,\* and the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple are to be charged, not upon the divine Legislator, but upon the infatuated presumption of

\* John viii. 56. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.

the Jewish teachers, and the judicial madness of the people in general. The gate of salvation was opened for the Jews, long before the Gentiles were called upon to enter in, nor was it until the wicked labourers had slain and cast forth his only Son, that the Lord of the vineyard was moved to destroy these wicked labourers, and let his vineyard to other labourers, who should render to him the fruits in their seasons.

The truth of what is above stated is evident, when we consider that our holy Saviour was born a Jew, and from his birth to his death was strictly subject to the Dispensation of Moses, complying in his own person with all its ceremonies, and recommending similar compliance to all his disciples and followers, in order that by no

neglect of the typical or ceremonial part of their religion, the Pharisees might be justified in the calumnies which accused him of an attempt to destroy the law of Moses. In the very lesson which inculcates the superiority of the duties of benevolence to the payment of tithes and other matters of observance, both are mentioned as existing duties, though precedence in weight and importance is given to the former.\* *These things ought ye to have done*, says our Lord, *and not to leave the other undone*. Again, when his divine power had restored the sick to health, they were commanded by him to repair to the temple, and purify themselves according to the Law. On all occasions, our divine Mediator shewed the most

\* Matthew xxiii. 23; and Luke vi. 42.

anxious wish to bring within the pale of his salvation, the ancient people distinguished as the favourites of the Deity ; and it was for them that he poured forth the pathetic lamentation, when he beheld their obduracy rejecting the means of salvation which he had condescended even to *entreat* them to receive from his hands — *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not !* Luke xiii. 34. The abrogation of the Jewish Law was not then the object of Christ's mission, it became only the consequence of their own wicked and obdurate blindness, in rejecting with scorn the offers of salvation which were

held forth to them, as the elder born, ere the Gentiles, like younger children, were invited to accept of the inheritance which the others had repudiated.

It would be a vain and idle enquiry to ask, in what extent, or to what purpose the Mosaic ritual might have subsisted, had the Jews as a nation accepted of the treasure held forth to them. But it is evident, from many passages in Scripture, and in particular, from the writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles, that not only was the Law of Moses esteemed cogent upon such as had been bred up in it, but many of the earlier Christian teachers erroneously conceived that its obligations extended to converts made from the heathen world at large. And although St. Paul combated this

rigour, as opposite to the plan and scope of the Gospel, which offered salvation to Gentile as well as to Jew, and maintained the circumcision of the new Law was that of the *heart* and not of the *letter* ; yet, in contending for the freedom of the Gentiles, and thereby incalculably enlarging the pale of salvation, the Apostle condemns not the observances of the Jewish proselytes, but allows that out of circumcision arises much profit every way. Undestroyed, therefore, and uncondemned by the new doctrine, the Mosaic institutions continued to linger, as things permitted to the Jews, but not enjoined to other Christians, until that part of the Church which consisted of Christian Jews or Judaizing Christians, gradually diminishing, merged at length

in the great mass of Christianity, and availed themselves of the general liberty.

We will suppose that our sceptic still prosecutes his objections, and urges further, that although the Law of Moses was not expressly abrogated by the Christian Dispensation, still it was superseded, and its destruction followed as a matter of course; and therefore, that if Christ came not on purpose to destroy the Law and the Prophets, still by and through his mission, it was actually destroyed. To this we have already returned one answer. It was not the offer of the Gospel to the Jews, but their ignorant and prejudiced rejection of that inestimable gift, which occasioned the destruction of Jerusalem, and the desolation of

Judah ; even as the storm and overthrow of a besieged city is not produced by a message, offering the inhabitants easy terms of safe submission, but by their own obstinacy in refusing to accept what was mercifully tendered. But another answer remains, comprehending within brief compass the great and awful mystery of Christianity.

Christ did not come, as we have already seen, to destroy the law ; but, *secondly*, he came to fulfil it. That which is fulfilled can in no sense be said to be destroyed, even though by means of its being fulfilled it should cease to exist. Thus, the crop of the husbandman is destroyed, if it perish through tempest in the field ; but if it is gathered into the garner, and put to the proper uses of

man, it is not in any sense destroyed, though consumed ; but, on the contrary, the purposes of its being reared are legitimately fulfilled. And in this sense the law of Moses being fulfilled in Christ Jesus, remains no longer binding on his faithful followers. He hath gathered in the harvest, and invites them for his sake and in his name, to partake of the bread of life, which by their own exertions they could never have obtained.

Our time is too limited to enlarge upon a doctrine in which is contained the very essence of our holy religion, and which in its breadth and profundity is deserving of more volumes than we can at present bestow words. Still, an outline, however brief and imperfect, must be offered of the great and wonderful

mystery of our salvation in the fulfilment of the law of Moses by our blessed Redeemer.

The books on which the Jewish religion was founded, were of two classes—the Law, and the Prophets.

The one announces typically, and the other prophetically, that the system of Moses was but for a season, and that it was to be in due time superseded by a brighter and more efficacious display of the divine power, and the arrival upon earth of a greater than Moses. The law of Moses was in itself a perfect law, but it enjoined perfect compliance with that law on the part of beings whose nature was imperfect. The blood of rams and of goats offered in the temple was but the type of that inestimable sacrifice which

was to atone for our imperfect obedience, and be offered up for our iniquities. Under the Mosaic dispensation, therefore, the law was incomplete with respect to those to whom it was given, for it could not be obeyed, or, in the words of our text, fulfilled.

The law of Moses was an institution of types and ceremonies, of minute observances, and abounding with positive injunctions and prohibitions, which, viewed separately, and with no regard to the system of which they made a part, or of their own latent and hidden meaning, might seem to a hasty observer arbitrary and trivial. Nay, as we have already seen, the wisest among the Jews themselves, and they who affected most sanctity, were so far misled as to admire and

practise this ritual for its *own* sake, and to the neglect both of the moral injunctions of the law, and of the hidden meaning of those very ceremonies intended to keep their minds awake, and open their eyes to conviction, when they should see, in the person of the Messiah, the types of their law paralleled and explained in those realities which they had dimly and vaguely indicated and shadowed forth. Such was the correspondence between the worship and sacrifices in the Temple, and that one great sacrifice by which all was fulfilled or accomplished ;—such was the Scape-goat sent into the wilderness laden with the sins of the people, in presage of Him who alone could have borne the burden of human iniquity ;—such was the veil of the sanc-

tuary which was rent asunder at the consummation of the great Atonement, to intimate that the division between Jew and Gentile was no more ;—such were many, very many other typical parts of the Jewish law, the meaning of which has been expounded by the Advent of Christ ; and such an analogy doubtless pervades the whole system, even where our eyes may be too weak, our judgments too obtuse to trace it. The law of Moses, therefore, so far as it was formal or ritual, was fulfilled and not destroyed—the type became unnecessary when the event typified had taken place ; and if the observance of the Hebrew rites was, as we have seen, indulged to those who had been educated under the law, it was

without any obligation upon those who had been born free.

The second class of sacred books under the Jewish Dispensation were those of the Prophets; and to these every Christian, capable of giving a reason for the hope which is in him, points with exultation, and appeals to their contents as the most undisputed proof of his sacred religion.\* Throughout all the books of

\* Christ himself, St. Luke informs us, [xxiv. 27.] when he appeared to the two disciples at Emmaus, after his resurrection, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” And upon that occasion reproved his disciples for the backwardness of their belief in doubting that the Prophecies would be *fully* accomplished by his resurrection. He also said to the twelve, previous to the awful consummation of his death, [Luke xviii. 31.] “Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things

these holy men, who, writing under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God, foretold the secret purposes of Heaven to those amongst whom they lived, repeated reference is made to the great change which was to take place in the destinies of the world by the Advent of that Messiah whom the Jews continue vainly to expect. Alas! the gathering of the nations has already taken place, and those who were first have become last, yet we hope will not ultimately remain last in the road of salvation. An infatuated and fatal blindness occupied their eyes and understanding, and prevented them from observing how, in the most minute points, the prophecies of their sages were ful-

that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished."—EDITOR.

filled in the person and history of Christ—how the various predictions and the events in which they were realized, united in the closest correspondence to each other—like the parts of some curious machine, wrought separately by the art of the mechanic, but with such accurate adjustment, that no sooner are they put together, than out of detached portions and limbs, there is composed, merely by their union, a whole, working with the most delicate accuracy the purpose for which it was invented. Such is the nature of the fulfilment of the law by Christ Jesus. He recalled that part of its institutions which concerned general virtue and duty, and which has been distinguished from the ceremonial part by the title of the Moral Law, from the narrow

and restricted sense to which the Jewish Rabbis had contracted it, by a close and verbal interpretation of its precepts. He explained its types, and fulfilled its prophecies, by his life, sufferings, and death. He did more, much more than all this. He paid in his own inestimable person that debt which fallen man owed to Almighty justice, and which, bankrupt by nature, it was impossible for him to discharge. He took upon himself that curse of the law which mere humanity could not endure, and by his perfect obedience and bitter sufferings, he made that atonement which his heavenly Father had a right to exact, but which even the destruction of the world could not have made; and gave us a right, trusting in his merits, to plead an ex-

emption from the strict and severe denunciations of the law under which we could not survive.

In no sense, therefore, was the ancient Mosaic Law destroyed. It may be compared to the moon, which is not forced from her sphere, or cast headlong from the Heavens, but which, having fulfilled her course of brightness, fades away gradually before the more brilliant and perfect light of day.

May God in his mercy make us all partakers of the blessings purchased and promised by his blessed Son, by whom the law was not destroyed, but fulfilled !

## DISCOURSE II.

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THE  
BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

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## DISCOURSE II.



## THE

## BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

## PSALM I.

- 1 “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
2. “But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.
3. “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

## 52 THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

4. "The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.
  5. "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
  6. "For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."
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As a prelude to the various lessons of holiness, which his lyrical compositions contain, the Psalmist, in the very first verse of these divine hymns, has treated, in general, of the condition of the righteous and the wicked, the blessings which Providence has destined for the former, and the misery and wretchedness to which the latter are certainly conducted, by the indulgence of their evil propensities ;

or, as the Rubrick expresses it—the happiness of the godly, the unhappiness of the ungodly.

In the first and second verse is described that line of conduct by which man, approaching as nearly to the full discharge of his duties, as his finite and imperfect faculties permit, may be supposed, in some sort, to merit the temporal and spiritual blessings annexed to obedience to the law of God. And here it must be observed, that the duties peculiarly inculcated, are those which immediately regard our Creator; and that those which we owe to our brethren of mankind, though of equal obligation, are postponed on the present occasion, the fear of God being the root and source out of which our love to our neighbour

must spring, and on which it must be grafted, otherwise it will, like wilding fruit, bear neither substance nor flavour. The qualities required of him who would obtain the blessing promised in the text, are of two kinds, negative and positive.

“The man is blessed,” saith our text, “that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” In general, these three expressions may be considered as relating to the same general proposition, and as amounting to a peremptory prohibition on the religious to frequent the society and company of the ungodly. The cause of this general interdict is too obvious to

be insisted upon. Man, naturally a social animal, is led by example to good or to evil, and the best may have enough to do in resisting the evil propensities of his own bosom, without their being strengthened and enforced by the contagious intercourse of those who are in the daily practice of indulging their passions. "Be not deceived," saith the Apostle; "evil communication corrupts good manners." The surest bond for our own continuing in the right path, is to abstain from the counsel which causeth to err.

But as error and its causes may be various, so the verse we have read, branches out into three especial warnings, respecting the various kinds of evil communication which are eschewed and

avoided by him whom the Psalmist pronounces blessed.

“ He walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly ;” that is, he seeks not their society, nor joins with them in their modes of reasoning, adopts not the selfish and worldly-wise arguments by which they impeach perhaps the truth and sanctity of the word of God, or enervate the energy of his precepts, or gloss over and apologize for their own neglect of religious duties. The divine may be doubtless called upon by his office, and other men, by circumstances annexed to their situation in society, to hear such reasoning in the mouths of sceptics and voluptuaries ; and it is in such cases the duty, not of the clergyman alone, but of all who are competent to the task, to refute

and repel the sophistries of the profane and ungodly. This, however, is not a walking by their counsel, but a marching in opposition to them—it is a going forth against them in the name of the Lord God of Israel whom they have defied, and at no time is the character of the righteous man more venerable, than when, with the calmness which the subject requires, and the gentleness which compassion for a blinded sinner ought to inspire, but without a shadow of fear or of doubt, he stands forth, like Elihu, the champion of the good cause ; nor can he further depart from his character (*passively* at least) than when, a mean and timid listener to doctrines, which if they shake not his *own* faith, may corrupt that of *others*, he is a patient auditor of the counsel of the ungodly.

*Secondly. The man is blessed who standeth not in the way of sinners.* In the former clause of the verse we are prohibited to listen to the *theory* of sin; in this we are forbidden to afford countenance by presence and acquiescence to the *practice*. We are not to lay the flattering unction to our souls—I have been with drunkards, but I was not drunken—I have been with men of violence, but I partook not in their aggressions—I was in the company of an evil troop, but I committed not evil along with them. Is it then no evil to defile the hands that should be pure, and the eye that should be single? Let us not permit the sight of guilt to familiarize our hearts to the practice of it; for even if we could be confident in our own godliness, (as God knows such confidence is

in itself a sinful rashness,) how many may be misled by the apparent countenance which our presence has afforded ! How many, even of the ungodly themselves, may have been strengthened in error, by supposing the guilt of their actions could not be so great, since a professor of righteousness continued the voluntary witness of what they did ! Wherefore let us beware that we countenance not sin by standing in the path of sinners.

*Thirdly.* Nor sitteth he, whom the psalmist describes, *in the seat of the scornful.* There is a grave and delusive reasoning which causeth to err—there is an *example of sin* which is more seductive than sophistry—but there is a third, and to many dispositions a yet more formidable mode of seduction, arising from evil communi-

cation. It is the fear of ridicule, a fear so much engrafted on our nature, that many shrink with apprehension from the laugh of scorers, who could refute their arguments, resist their example, and defy their violence. There has never been an hour or an age, in which this formidable weapon has been more actively employed against the Christian faith than our own day. Wit and ridicule have formed the poignant sauce with which infidels have seasoned their abstract reasoning, and voluptuaries the swinish messes of pollution, which they have spread unblushingly before the public. It is a weapon suited to the character of the Apostate Spirit himself, such as we conceive him to be—loving nothing, honouring nothing, feeling neither the enthusiasm of religion nor

of praise, but striving to debase all that is excellent, and degrade all that is noble and praiseworthy, by cold irony and contemptuous sneering.

We are far from terming a harmless gratification of a gay and lively spirit sinful or even useless. It has been said, and perhaps with truth, that there are tempers which may be won to religion, by indulging them in their natural bent towards gaiety. But supposing it true that a jest *may* sometimes hit him, who flies a sermon, too surely there are a hundred cases for one where the sermon cannot remedy the evil which a jest has produced. According to our strangely varied faculties, our sense of ridicule, although silent, remains in ambush and upon the watch during offices of the deepest so-

lemnity, and actions of the highest sublimity; and if aught happens to call it into action, the sense of the ludicrous becomes more resistless from the previous contrast, and the considerations of decorum, which ought to restrain our mirth, prove like oil seethed upon the flame. There is also an unhappy desire in our corrupt nature, to approve of audacity even in wickedness, as men chiefly applaud those feats of agility which are performed at the risk of the artist's life. And such is the strength and frequency of this unhallowed temptation, that there are perhaps but few, who have not at one time or other fallen into the snare, and laughed at that at which they ought to have trembled. But, O my soul, come not thou into their secret, nor yield thy part of the

promised blessing, for the poor gratification of sitting in the seat of the scorner, and sharing in the unprofitable mirth of fools, which is like the crackling of thorns under the pot !

The second verse contains the positive employment of the righteous man. *His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* The object of the righteous is to fulfil what the patriarchs of our church have well termed “ the chief end of man—to glorify God,” namely, “ and to enjoy him for ever ;” and that he may qualify himself for this, his study is in the Holy Scriptures. He is satisfied with no ceremonious repetition of the Sacred Book, by rote, but that he may come to a true knowledge of the things belonging to his salvation, he me-

ditates upon them, by day and night, searching out the hidden meaning and genuine spirit of those texts which others pass over as hard to be understood. We know the attention bestowed by men of learning upon human laws, and how long a portion of their time must be devoted to study ere they can term themselves acquainted with the municipal laws of any civilized realm; and is it then to be imagined that the laws of the Supreme are to be understood at a slighter expense of leisure than those of earthly legislators? Be assured, that when we have meditated upon them, as in the text, by day and night, our time will even *then* have been lost, unless faith hath been our commentator and interpreter.

The third verse describes, by a beautiful

eastern simile, the advantages with which the forbearance from evil counsel, from the company of sinners, and from the mirth of scoffers and blasphemers, must needs be attended. *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*

In one point of view this striking promise may be supposed to refer to temporal blessings, which, under the theocracy of the Jews, were more directly and more frequently held forth as the reward of the righteous, than under the dispensations of the Gospel. We must own, also, that even in our own times, religion is sometimes the means of procuring temporal prosperity to its votaries. The more a man

meditates upon God's law, the more he feels it his duty to render his life useful to his fellow-creatures. And tried honesty, approved fidelity, devoted courage, public spirit, the estimation created by a blameless conduct, and the general respect which even the profane bear to a man of conscience and honesty, often elevate to eminence; and happy is it for the land when such are its princes and governors, or are possessors and distributors of its wealth and fulness. But though this be true, we shall err grossly if we conceive temporal felicity is here alluded to as being either the appropriate or the unvaried reward of righteousness. Were this the case, an earthly, inadequate, and merely transient reward, would be unworthy of spiritual merit; and were it to be the certain

and unvaried consequence of a due discharge of religious duties, I fear that though the banks of our Jordan might be more thickly studded than at present with trees fair and flourishing in outward appearance, the core of many would be tainted with rottenness; or, without a metaphor, men who were not *openly* profane, would drive a trade with their religion, under the mask of hypocrisy.

It is safer therefore to view the blessed state of the righteous, as consisting in that calm of the mind, which no one can enjoy without the applause of his own conscience, and the humble confidence in which, with mingled faith and hope, the good man throws himself on the protection of Providence. *His* leaves which wither not, but clothe him as well in

the winter of adversity, as in the spring and summer of prosperity, are goodly and comforting reflections, that in whatever state he is called to, he is discharging the part destined for him by an affectionate and omnipotent Father;—and his incorruptible fruits rendered in their season, are good and pious thoughts towards God, kind and generous actions towards his fellow-creatures, sanctified, because rendered in the spirit and with the humble faith of a Christian.

*The ungodly are not so, saith the next verse; but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*

If the righteousness of the just is sometimes followed by temporal prosperity, the wickedness of the profane is yet more frequently attended by temporal pun-

ishment. The cause of this is obvious : he that does not fear *God*, will not regard *man*. He that has disbelieved or defied the divine commandment, has only the fear of temporal punishment left to prevent him from invading the laws of society ; and the effect of this last barrier must be strong or weak, in proportion to the strength of passion and the greatness of temptation. And hence that frequent introduction to the history of great crimes, that the perpetrators began their course by disuse of public worship, breaking the Lord's day, and neglect of private devotion, and thus opened the way for themselves to infamy and to execution. How many in a higher class in society, languish under diseases, which are the consequence of their own excesses,

or suffer indigence and contempt, through their own folly and extravagance !

But, as prosperity in this life is neither the genuine nor the certain reward of the righteous, so neither is temporal adversity the constant requital of the ungodly. On the contrary, we have seen the wicked great in power, and flourishing like a green bay-tree ; yet could we have looked into his bosom at that moment of prosperity, how true we should have found the words of the Psalmist ! The sophistry which *he* borrowed from the counsels of the ungodly, gives no assurance of happiness, and leads him to no solid or stable conclusion ; the wit with which the scorner taught him to gloss over his infidel opinions, has lost its

brilliancy—*behind* him there is remorse ; *before* him there is doubt. While the godly is fast moored on the Rock of Ages, *he* is in a stormy sea, without a chart, without a compass, without a pilot. The perturbed reasoning, the secret fears of such a one, make his thoughts indeed like the chaff which the wind drives to and fro, being as worthless and profitless as they are changeable and uncertain. A person, distinguished as much for his excesses at one period of his life, as he was afterwards for his repentance, mentioned after his happy change, that one day, when he was in the full career of wit and gaiety, admired by the society of which he appeared the life, while all applauded and most envied him, “ he could not for-

bear groaning inwardly, and saying to himself,

‘ O that I were that dog ! ’ —

looking on one which chanced to be in the apartment.\* Such were the secret thoughts of one who had *followed the counsel of the ungodly, walked in the way of sinners, and sate in the seat of the scornful.* Regretting the *past*, sick of the *present*, fearing the *future* ; having little hope beyond a gloomy wish for annihilation, he was willing to exchange all the privileges and enjoyments of wit, understanding, and intellectual superiority, for the mean faculties, and irresponsible existence of a beast that perishes. *He* must have been indeed like chaff

\* See Doddridge's *Life of Colonel Gardiner.*

tormented by the wind, ere he could have formed a wish at once so dreadful and so degrading !

The fifth verse following out of the theme which the Psalmist proposed, informs us, that *the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.* After death cometh the judgment. How strict, how terrible that judgment shall be, we may learn from the blessed Apostle in the second epistle to the Thessalonians.\* *Then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.* Will it then be received as an apology, that the sophistries by which the ungodly were misled, were ingenious,

\* 2 Thess. ii. 8.

that they were urged with plausibility, and rendered diverting by wit? Alas! my brethren, we are informed in the same passage, that the strength of their deception is part of their very crime. God placed evil and good, truth and falsehood before them, and gave them means of judging betwixt them, and embracing that which they should choose; and the having forsaken good for evil, and the truth of the Gospel for the vain sophistries of men, is the very crime of which they are accused. *And for this cause, (says the Apostle,) God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.\** It is then that

\* 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

the divine Shepherd will for ever separate the goats from the sheep, that the blessed Husbandman shall purge the floor of the garner with his fan, that the Captain of our Salvation shall leave no spies in his camp, and the King of our Glory endure no traitors in his territory.

The concluding verse of the Psalm vindicates, in a few words, the promises which have been made to the righteous, and the judgments which have been denounced against the ungodly. *For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.* The omniscience of the Deity is the touchstone by which the merits of the righteous, and the guilt of the wicked shall ultimately be determined. No false opinions formed concerning them during life can

deceive that unerring Judge; no counterfeit, however brilliant, can pass for pure gold; no forgery, however ingenious, can supply the place of the testimonial which he demands. *The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous.* He was perhaps lightly esteemed among his fellow-men, considered as an unsocial and scrupulous devotee, an enemy to free investigation, because he walked not by the counsel of the ungodly; a severe censor of harmless levities, because he stood not in the way of sinners; a foe to innocent mirth, because he sate not in the seat of the scorner. Let him nevertheless come boldly, before the heavenly Judge; He knoweth his ways. When his left hand knew not the good deeds which were wrought by his right,

the Lord beheld them. *His* eye was upon him in solitude and secrecy, and his spirit guided him during his daily and nightly meditations on his Law. At the time when the righteous was perhaps most misconstrued by his brethren of men, he was most acceptable to his heavenly Father, who knew his way—not his *actions* only, however secret, but the *principles* upon which these actions were founded.

Again, let not the wicked confide in the refined hypocrisy with which he may have been able to deceive men, nay, perhaps to cheat himself, by blending actions of apparent merit, and sentiments in themselves praiseworthy, with a course of life, such as that which the Psalmist has denounced. If he be an underminer

of God's law, and a scoffer at his commandments, what will it avail him, that he has given alms, and distributed to his poorer brethren the food that perishes, while he was dashing from their lips, and trampling, in their presence, upon the bread of eternal life? Good deeds, whether done to be seen of men, or flowing from the natural disposition of the human heart, to relieve itself from the pain attending the sight of distress, however applauded by those who witnessed them, will sink to their proper level and estimation in the eyes of the Divinity, which will *not* view them as an atonement for a life spent in the habitual breach of his Law, and contempt of his Commandments. *The way of the ungodly shall perish.*

Wherefore may we all find grace in God, for the sake of Christ Jesus, to labour and improve the time, until we pass into the awful presence of Him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins.

THE END.

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